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TO:

RPM'S

From:

Charles Buril  
EAO

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NASA - JPL  
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Subject:

FYI

# Water authority sues Aerojet over cleanup

By Laurence Darmiento  
STAFF WRITER

**COVINA** — Carrying out a threat it had made last month, the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority sued Aerojet-General Corp. in federal court Tuesday for more than \$1.5 million it has spent cleaning up contaminated ground water.

In the first lawsuit filed under federal Superfund law over the Valley's ground water contamination problem, the water quality agency is seeking to be reimbursed for

helping construct a La Puente-area treatment plant.

However, the agency agreed to halt service of the lawsuit for up to 60 days if the Rancho Codova-based defense contractor agrees to place \$1.1 million in a trust account by April 14 while starting negotiations over the rest of the funds.

"We want the money, and we want a seat at the table," said Bob Kuhn, president of the water quality board, which voted in closed session Monday to take the legal action.

## WATER Bills have increased about \$15 a month

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Aerojet's West Hollyvale Street plant in Azusa has been cited by federal regulators as the source of rocket chemicals that have fouled a 27-square-mile swath of ground water, including all three production wells pumped by the La Puente Valley County Water District.

The area was added to the national Superfund list of polluted sites in 1984, which requires those responsible for contamination to pay for cleanup and allows third parties to recover costs for cleanup.

Construction on a \$4.6 million plant to treat the chemicals polluting the small water district's wells began last year and is now being tested. It was jointly funded by three agencies, including the water quality authority.

Rosemary Younts, an Aerojet spokeswoman, said the company was studying the legal action and so far had little to say on the matter.

"The only thing I can say at this point is that we are still

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*Carol Williams, executive officer of the watermaster*

evaluating the options," she said.

Kirby Brill, executive director of the water quality authority, said the agency felt compelled to take the action after two years of unfruitful negotiations with Aerojet forced it to proceed with the treatment plant without the company's financial assistance.

"We have to start drawing lines in the sand, and this is it," he said.

The water quality authority has asked the Upper San Gabriel Municipal Water District and the San Gabriel Basin Watermaster, which were equal funding partners in the project, to join the lawsuit.

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Robert Berlien, general manager of the upper district, said his agency's board has indicated they would like to join the suit.

However, the watermaster, a quasi-public agency that manages the water basin, has been less than supportive of the lawsuit. It has been negotiating with Aerojet to reach a settlement that would cover all cleanup costs at the Superfund site.

Estimates have placed those costs as high as \$200 million.

"I don't think that a lawsuit is going to enhance our negotiations by any means, but I continue to be optimistic we can reach a settlement and avoid litigation," said Carol Williams, executive officer of the watermaster.

Mike Berlien, general manager of the La Puente water district, said the small water district may in the future join the lawsuit in order to get some rate relief for its customers.

The district has had to buy water from other suppliers to meet the demands of its 10,000 customers, hiking monthly bills about \$15 a month. But the district does not have a lot of money for lawyers, he said.

"Because we are small, we are taking a conservative approach," he said.